

THE NATURAL CURE FOR SPIRITUAL DISEASE

: A Guide into Buddhist Science

by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

(translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu)

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Part II :

THE USE OF DHAMMA - YOUR PRACTICE OF DHAMMA

(February 6, 1986)

Our apologies that the formatting & Pali spelling in this chapter are not yet finished.

[\(click here for glossary\)](#)

I'd like to express my happiness at this second opportunity to speak with you. Last time, we discussed what we will get from Dhamma, from Buddhism. This time, we'll discuss the successful use of Dhamma, that is, how to live with Dhamma.

When speaking about Dhamma, we mean the knowledge that we must practice in order to cure spiritual disease. When speaking about this practice, there are four important things (*dhammas*) to be understood.¹ These four things are *sati* (mindfulness, reflective awareness), *sampajañña* (wisdom-in-action, ready comprehension), *samādhi* (collectedness, concentration), and *paññā* (intuitive wisdom, insight). If you consider them carefully, you will find that you have caused these four things to arise through your practice of *anapanasati* (mindfulness with breathing).² Now, we must discuss in detail how to use these four dhammas. We'll consider them one by one.

SATI

Sati (mindfulness, reflective awareness, recollection) is the quick awareness and recall of the things which must be recalled. It must be as quick as an arrow. We also can describe *sati* as a vehicle or transport mechanism of the fastest kind. This most rapid transport doesn't carry material things, it carries wisdom and knowledge. *Sati* delivers *paññā* (wisdom) in time to meet our needs. Through the practice of mindfulness with breathing, *sati* is trained fully.

SAMPAJAÑÑA

The second dhamma is *sampajanna*. *Sampajanna* is wisdom as it meets up with and immediately confronts a problem, as it deals with and wipes out that problem -- this is wisdom-in-action. It is only that wisdom specifically related and applied to a particular situation or event. Nonetheless, you may have come across a variety of translations for "sampajanna," which can be rather confusing. We recommend that you remember it as "wisdom-in-action." Even better, learn the Pali word about which there is no doubt. The word "wisdom" encompasses many meanings and understandings, we can't even begin to estimate its content. However, the word "sampajanna" is far more limited in its meaning. It is exactly that wisdom directly needed for the problem that confronts us. Active wisdom isn't general, it is a matter of particulars.

The same holds for the word "Dhamma," which has an incredible variety of meanings, depending on how it is being used. When Dhamma is applied to solve a specific problem, event, or situation, there is a specific Dhamma particular to that situation. The meaning is limited to the occasion and its circumstances. In this case of Dhamma solving problems, the most precise and proper term is "*dhamma-sacca*" (Dhamma-Truth). *Dhamma-sacca* is the particular dhamma called for by the immediate situation with which we must cope, be it the onset of spiritual disease or exposure to the germs of spiritual disease. It is the use of just the right thing in a specific incident or event.

We can compare Dhamma with the medicine chest in our house. In it we store a wide variety of drugs, pills, capsules, ointments, powders, and syrups for possible use. When we're actually sick, we must choose from among the many the one drug which will be effective in treating our ailment. We can't take them all; we take just what is needed to cure our illness here and now. The same is true for Dhamma. Understand that there's an incredible amount of what we call Dhamma and *paññā*, but that we only apply a little bit at a time. We apply just that portion which can take care of the immediate situation. Know how to use the Dhamma,

the *paññā*, which is exactly relevant to our situation and problem. The Dhamma or

wisdom which controls that situation and problem is what we call "sampajanna."

SAMADHI

The third dhamma of today's session is *samādhi*. This literally means "well-established mind, properly-maintained mind, correctly-founded *samādhi* mind." The Buddha gave the broadest possible meaning to *samādhi* when he defined it as "the one-pointed mind (*ekaggata-citta*) that has *nibbana* as its object."³

We can say that *samādhi* has three characteristics: *parisuddhi* (purity), *samahita* (firmness, steadiness, stability), and *kammanaya* (activeness, readiness, workableness). Thus, when you want to know whether the mind is in a state of *samādhi* or not, examine it for these three qualities. See whether or not it is pure, stable, and active.

When we speak of the power or energy of *samādhi*, we mean the way the mind focusses all of its energy on a single point. This is similar to the magnifying glass's ability to focus the sun's rays onto a single point so that a flame appears. Similarly, when the mind's power is collected into one point, then it is one-pointed. The mind that is *samādhi* produces a very powerful energy, which is stronger than any other kind of power. We can describe this highly concentrated mind in two ways. The first is *indriya*, which means "sovereign" or "chief." The second is *bala*, which means "power, force, strength." Thus, we have *samādhi-indriya* and *samādhi-bala*, the mind that has sovereignty and is more powerful than any other thing.

Samādhi must work together with wisdom. *Samādhi* is like a knife's weight and *paññā* is like its sharpness. For a knife to cut anything properly, it must have two things: weight and sharpness. A knife that is heavy but dull, like a hammer, can't cut anything and only makes a mess. On the other hand, a very sharp knife that lacks weight, like a razor blade, likewise can't cut through whatever it is we must cut. A knife needs both properties; the mind is the same. To do what it needs to do the mind requires both *samādhi* and *paññā*. You might wonder what it is that cuts, is it the knife's weight or its sharpness? If you can understand this, it will be easier for you to understand how Dhamma cuts through problems, that is, mental defilements. In the moment of sampajanna's activity, both *samādhi*, and *paññā* are working together to slice through the problem. They're interconnected and, in practice, can't be separated.

PAÑÑĀ

There remains only the last dhamma to discuss: *paññā* (wisdom, intuitive knowledge, insight). The meaning of this word is broad and includes much. Literally, it means "to know fully," but not everything that there is to know, only those things which should be known. *Paññā* is the full and adequate knowing of all things which should be known. Of all the things that we could know, *paññā* refers only to those things which we need to know, the knowledge which is able to solve our problems. For example, it isn't necessary to know about atomic nuclei or outer space. We only need to know what quenches dukkha (spiritual disease) directly in our mind.

That which we should know is solely a matter of the quenching of dukkha. This statement agrees with the Buddha who said that he says nothing about other matters, that he speaks only of dukkha and the end of dukkha. There is a beautiful, meaningful quotation in the Pali which we'd like you to hear:

Pubbe caha bhikkhave etarahica dukkhañceva paññapemi dukkhassa ca nirodha.
Bhikkhus! In times past, as well as now,
I speak only of dukkha and the utter extinction of dukkha.

The Buddha didn't mention the future because it doesn't exist. As for the past and present, he taught only these two things.

Among the things we should know, we can talk of four important aspects of wisdom. The first topic I'd like to point out is the three characteristics of existence

wisdom. The first topic I'd like to point out is the three characteristics of existence (*ti-lakkhana*): *anicca* (impermanence, change), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness), and *anatta* (non-self, selflessness). Detailed explanations of the three characteristics can be found in many different books. Today we will only summarize them.

COMPOUNDING

Anicca means that all compounded things are constantly changing. Please note that we're speaking only of compounded things. The uncompounded thing doesn't have the characteristic of anicca. Impermanence only applies to things that are produced through causes and conditions. As this term "compounded thing" is important, you would do well to learn the original Pali term, "sankhara." *Sankhara* means "to form, to compound, to concoct, to condition," that is, all the myriad things are constantly conditioning new things. This is a characteristic or activity of all phenomenal things, such as these trees around us. Different causes have come together in them. New things arise, there is growth and development, leaves grow and fall, there is ceaseless change. Sankhara is this continuous activity of formation. Anything which is conditioned into existence is called "sankhara." That, in turn, conditions the arising of other things and those things are also called "sankhara." Thus, sankhara are both things conditioned and the things which condition, both the causes and results of conditioning.

We can compare this endless compounding of sankhara with the bricks in a wall. Each brick props up another brick and that brick props up another, which props up other bricks, and so on through the successive layers of bricks. Each brick is supported by some of the bricks, while it supports other bricks; it relates to them both as supporter and supportee. Thus, sankhara has three meanings, both verb and noun. The first meaning, the verb, is the activity of forming, conditioning, compounding. The second meaning refers to the things conditioned by that activity and the third refers to the causes and conditions of that activity. The meaning of sankhara is as broad as this.

Observe the activity of conditioning; you will see it in everything. Without this fact of things being continually formed and ceaselessly forming other things, there would be no existence or life. There can be life or existence only through this constant conditioning and reconditioning. But sometimes this conditioning is very subtle and we don't see it. It may even be hidden, as in a rock. There is perpetual conditioning happening within each rock, but when you look, your eyes may not detect it. Nevertheless, see the process of ceaseless conditioning in all things which exist.

The best approach is to see the conditioning within ourselves. It's all happening within our bodies. We can see the conditioning here, we can see the things as they are conditioned here, and we can see the things which make the conditioning. By looking within, we can see all this sankhara. There's the conditioning of the body-aggregate (*rupa-khandha*); the conditioning of the feeling-aggregate (*vedana-khandha*); the conditioning of *sanna-khandha* (the aggregate of perceptions, recognitions, and classifications); the conditioning of the thinking-aggregate (*sankhara-khandha*); and, lastly, the conditioning of the consciousness-aggregate (*vinnana-khandha*). These five important groups, or aggregates, of existence and their constant conditioning can all be seen within our living bodies.

CONTACT POINTS

Examine the transmission or contact points: now the eyes work, now the ears work, now the nose works, now the tongue works, now the skin works, now the mind works. One-by-one they perform their duties and do their work. When one functions, in that moment there is sankhara. This is when, where, and how the conditioning can be observed. In the body alone, there is ceaseless conditioning and constant change. The cells die and new ones form such that before long they've all been replaced. Even these physical aspects of existence fully exhibit sankhara. For in this body there are the six internal sense organs: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. They meet up with their external objects: forms,

sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and mental objects. When the sense organ interacts with the corresponding sense object -- for example the eyes see a form or the ears hear a sound -- there is immediate conditioning. A form is seen, a sound is heard, an odor is smelled. We call this "phassa" (contact). It's the starting point for conditioning; a series of further sankhara arises from it. The meeting of sense organ and sense object (eyes and form, ears and sound, ... mind and mental object) conditions phassa. Phassa conditions vedana (feeling: the pleased and displeased mental reactions toward the sense experiences). Vedana helps to condition sanna, because perceptions and recognitions arise through the influence of feelings. What is felt, that is recognized and classified. Sanna then conditions various thoughts and thinking, including emotions (sankhara-khandha). This leads to doing this and doing that. Then, there are the results of the actions, which lead to further thinking, which lead to further action, and so it goes. This is one example of what we mean by "conditioning." We see that this sort of conditioning goes on constantly, even in our own bodies. It never stops, never takes a rest, never pauses. It continues whether we're asleep or awake. This perpetual flux, this ceaseless flow, is the characteristic of anicca.

DUKKHA-NESS

When we clearly see the characteristic of anicca, it is easy to understand the second characteristic, dukkha -- unsatisfactoriness, unbearableness, ugliness, worthlessness. If we want things to go our way according to our thoughts, we'll experience dukkha. When things change from what we like or want, we feel dukkha. In fact, they never really are what we want, because they never stop changing long enough to really be something. Thus, we have the problem that unsatisfactoriness (dukkha) is endless. It's so difficult to with all of this conditioning, amid all these shifting things. This is the characteristic of dukkha.

Looking closely we see that we ourselves are impermanent, painful, and unsatisfying. The things that we love, that satisfy us, are anicca and dukkha. The things that we dislike are anicca and dukkha. There is nothing among all this sankhara which is nicca (permanent) and adukkha (satisfying, enduring). We must see anicca and dukkha within ourselves in this way.

When we see impermanence completely, when we see unsatisfactoriness fully-- clearly and obviously -- then we automatically see that all those things are anatta (not-self). They aren't permanent selves that we can call "me." Amid all the change and conditioning, there is no individual entity or eternal substance that can be called a "self." Everything is anatta or not-self. Things exist; we are not saying they don't. What is, is; but everything that is, is not-self. We shouldn't misunderstand and think that we have a self (*attā*). There is only the flow of change. All this is the understanding or *paññā* regarding anicca, dukkha, and anatta.

VOIDNESS

The second topic is the understanding or *paññā* regarding sunnata (voidness). When we see the three characteristics of anicca, dukkha, and anatta, when we realize that all things are not-self, then we understand that everything is not-self, is void of anything that has the meaning of the word "self," and is free of anything that ought to be called "self." This is the meaning of sunnata. This single characteristic of voidness gathers together and caps the previous three characteristics.

The meaning of "*suññata*" is better, broader, easier, and more useful than any other word to take as a principle of practice and life, but only if we understand it on the Dhamma level, in the language of *sati-pañña* (mindfulness and wisdom). It should not be misunderstood through materialistic interpretations, such as "nothing exists" or that "all is a vacuum." The Buddha pointed out that such nihilist views are one extreme of wrong understanding. Sunnata isn't nihilism or a nothingness. Everything exists, but is void and free of anything that could be called

a self. Thus, we say that everything is void, which is the meaning of voidness in the language of Dhamma. If we see voidness, it includes seeing anicca, dukkha, and anatta also. We don't need too many things, the three can be untidy. Just one -- voidness -- is enough to prevent against the mental defilements.⁴

When we see voidness in the things that we love, we don't love. When we see voidness in the things we hate, we don't hate. Then there's no love and no hate, no liking and no disliking, no happiness (*sukha*) and no dukkha. There is just centeredness, living quietly and freely in the middle. Such is the fruit of truly seeing the voidness of things. If we don't see the voidness of all things, we will love some things and hate others. While love and hatred remain, the mind is enslaved by attachment to the things loved and hated. With full penetration of sunnata, the mind is free and no longer a slave to those things. True freedom is voidness.

Sunnata is a synonym of nibbana. Nibbana is voidness. When the mind realizes voidness, there are no defilements. When there are no defilements, there is no heat. When there is no heat, there is nibbana, which means "coolness." Thus, when there is sunnata, there is coolness, nibbana. The Lord Buddha said, "You should always view the world as something void of atta (self) and attaniya (belonging to self)." This is the second aspect of *paññā*.⁵

THE LAW OF NATURE

The third topic I'd like to mention is conditionality (*idappaccayata*), which means:

because this is, this is; because this arises, this arises; because this is not, this is not; because this quenches, this quenches.

These conditions are called "*idappaccayata*," the law that things happen according to causes and conditions. We can also call it dependent origination (*paticca-samuppada*) because *idappaccayata* and *paticca-samuppada* are the same thing, the same principle of wisdom to be studied, seen, and understood. You will see that everything in the world is constantly flowing, that all the world is in continual flux. It is a profound and complex matter. Many books treat it in great detail, particularly when it's described in terms of dependent origination. As we don't have much time today, you may need to consult some of those books.⁶

THUSNESS

Now, we come to the fourth and last topic: tathata (suchness, thusness). "Merely thus," "just such": everything is such as it is and in no way different from that thusness. This is called "tathata." When tathata is seen, the three characteristics of anicca, dukkha, and anatta are seen, sunnata is seen, and *idappaccayata* is seen. Tathata is the summary of them all -- merely thus, only thus, not-otherness. There is nothing better than this, more than this, other than this, thusness. To intuitively realize tathata is to see the truth of all things, to see the reality of the things which have deceived us. The things which delude us are all the things which cause discrimination and duality to arise in us: good-evil, happiness-sadness, win-lose, love-hate, etc. There are many pairs of opposites in this world. By not seeing tathata, we allow these things to trick us into believing in duality: this-that, liking-disliking, hot-cold, male-female, defiled, enlightened. This delusion causes all our problems. Trapped in these oppositions, we can't see the truth of things. We fall into liking and disliking, which in turn leads to the defilements, because we don't see tathata.

What we must see constantly and deeply is that good is a sankhara and that evil is a sankhara too. The pleasant and unpleasant feelings, *sukha* and *dukkha*, are both sankhara. Getting and disappearing, losing and winning all are sankhara. There isn't anything which isn't a sankhara. Thus, all things are the same -- tathata. All things are just suchness, just this way, not otherwise. Further, we can say that heaven is a sankhara and hell is a sankhara. So, heaven and hell are tathata -- just thus. Our minds should be above heaven and above hell, above good and above

bad, above joy and above dukkha in all respects. Tathata is the fourth area of understanding or *paññā*, the wisdom that must be developed to a sufficient degree. We must study reality on both the physical-material level and on the mental-spiritual level, until our knowledge and wisdom is adequate, natural, and constant.

Now, we know these four dhammas: *sati*, *sampajanna*, *samādhi*, and *panna*. Next, we must know how to apply them so that they will be correct, successful, and beneficial *paññā*. The question, now, is how to use Dhamma, or Buddhism, in our everyday lives.

EVERYDAY USE

How are we going to use them in our daily reality? A quick answer is that we must live through these four dhammas. We must use these four dhammas correctly to face all the situations and problems that arise each day. Whenever there arises a situation which can lead to problems or dukkha -- such as the eyes seeing a form, the ears hearing a sound, or the mind thinking a thought -- we must have *sati*. *Sati* realizes that something is happening and recalls the *paññā* relevant to that event. *Sati* immediately transports the necessary wisdom to that situation in time to deal with any possible problems. Mindfulness comes first.

That wisdom applied to the experience is *sampajanna*. Delivered on time by *sati*, wisdom-in-action deals with the immediate situation. Then, in the very moment when *sampajanna* goes to work, the power and strength of *samādhi* gives force and energy to wisdom so that it can cut through the problem. To the degree that there is *samādhi*, to that degree wisdom-in-action will be able to solve the problem. *Paññā* acts as the warehouse of accumulated knowledge and insight which *sati* draws upon to deal with the sense experiences.

When these four dhammas work together in this way, we'll see that we are most intelligent in that moment. We are so clever because we're able to encounter the situation right then and there without any problems arising. We don't become enslaved to the meanings of any of the pairs of opposites. This is the free life, which is peaceful and cool. It's the best thing human beings ought to get.

To summarize, we must have sufficient *paññā*, must use *sati* at all times, must apply *sampajanna* correctly and sufficiently, and must apply *samādhi* properly and in adequate strength. Together these four dhammas are sufficiently and correctly used in every situation that may arise with us. This is the answer to the question: how do we use the Dhamma successfully?

I hope that each of you will try to use these four dhammas in your lives. Nothing else will justify the time, effort, and expense which you have spent in coming here. I hope that you don't leave here in debt, but that you make a profit out of your stay.

Endnotes

1. The most basic meaning of the word "*dhamma*" is thing. Here it has the sense of "quality" or "virtue". You will find, however, that it has many meanings, levels, and ramifications. See the Glossary, for a start.
2. The system of meditation taught at Suan Mokkh. See *Mindfulness With Breathing*, by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (Wisdom, Boston: 1996).
3. "*Ekagatta-citta*" should not be confused with "*ekagatta*." Although both may be rendered "one-pointedness," they are used in different contexts. The latter term refers to a factor of *jhana*. The former term refers to the "mind with a single purpose or object."
4. *Kilesa*: disruptions and contaminations of the mind's natural peacefulness and radiance. They are discussed in Chapter III.

radiance. They are discussed in Chapter III.

5. For more on sunnata, see Ajarn Buddhadasa's *Heartwood From The Bodhi Tree*, published by Wisdom Publications, Boston, USA.

6. See Ajarn Buddhadasa's *Practical Dependent Origination* (Dhamma Study & Practice Group, Bangkok: 1992). Other talks on *paticca-samuppāda* will be published in the next year or two.

Go to Part III : New Life of Peace

Translated by Santikaro Bhikkhu

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